



From
the
Vets

Team Cobas

Volunteers with specialised expertise are also hard at work in our laboratory

Zoos SA gains enormous and varied benefits from its army of volunteers. The Animal Health Centre (AHC) is lucky to enjoy voluntary support in a number of specialised areas.

The longest standing volunteer cogs in the AHC machine are the members of Team Cobas. When Adelaide Zoo built a new veterinarian hospital in 2000, then head veterinarian, Dr David Schultz, ensured a laboratory was included in the plans, and Brian Rich agreed to run it.

Brian is an industrial biochemist who established Wombaroo-Passwell, a South Australian company that has become internationally renowned for developing and manufacturing an extensive range of milk replacers and other specialised foods for native Australian and exotic animals. Peter McCarthy, retired medical scientist (who fielded in the gully, opposite David Schultz at forward short leg, for the Old Ignatians Cricket Club), and Wayne Rohrig, retired pharmacist, complete the Team Cobas trio.

The lab, festooned with a carved wooden sign on the door reading 'Old Farts' Bar', is decked out with a Cobas biochemistry analyser (after which the team is named), coulter counter and high-performance liquid chromatograph as well as centrifuges, microbalances, incubators, water baths, microscopes, muffle furnaces, and shelves lined with countless bottles harbouring a Pandora's box of chemicals.

Several afternoons a week, Team Cobas carry out all manner of diagnostic and research work. From routine blood tests to vitamin assays, from antioxidant evaluation to nutritional analyses, to determining what substances colour a particular bird's feather, Team Cobas are an integral part of maintaining the health of our zoos' animals, as well as many of our field-based projects. In addition, numerous honours and PhD students hosted by Zoos SA have taken advantage of the services and expertise offered by Team Cobas.

The lab also hosts Board member and biologist, Clive Watts, who labours for hours examining ants from Monarto Zoo under a dissecting microscope. Brian Matthews, a retired haematologist, also provides his services to analyse blood films from zoo animals and those from a number of field projects.

Doubling as a cultural hub for robust debate and sage advice on science, sport, philosophy and fishing, the lab frequently attracts an eclectic mix of veterinary staff, keepers, directors, academics, students and others.

May Team Cobas haunt the halls of the Adelaide Zoo Animal Health Centre for many years to come.

David McLelland
Veterinarian