



Zoo Edition Archives - Spring 2000

Excerpts from interview with WPZ's Associate Veterinarian Dr. Darin Collins:

WPZ: When did you know that you wanted to be a veterinarian?

Dr. Darin: From the beginning, first and second grade. I always liked animals. I used to watch Disney and Wild Kingdom with Marlin Perkins. I've always liked science.

WPZ: What kind of education and training do you have?

Dr. Darin: I took a lot of advanced science classes: calculus, physics, physiology and chemistry. I majored in chemistry and biology at the University of Illinois, where I also went to veterinary school. I was at the University of Illinois for nine years. After graduating I worked in emergency care and continued to focus on exotic animal species. While working as a veterinarian in Colorado, I also volunteered at the Denver Zoo and then at the Shedd Aquarium and Lincoln Park Zoo when I lived in Chicago.

WPZ: What is the best part of your job?

Dr. Darin: Variety! I like getting to work with all the different species of animals. It's also very exciting working with consultants, all kinds of doctors in the community that volunteer their time to care for the animals. I get to work with veterinarians from all over the world. I've been able to travel to Malaysia and Indonesia where I've trained veterinarians. I like the research and writing. I use the internet and talk to other vets to get information. For example: Woodland Park Zoo is getting Komodo dragons this year and I had to ask other professionals about their diet and other health issues. I'm always learning.

WPZ: What challenges are involved in your job?

Dr. Darin: You have to understand the behavior and the natural history of the animal you're working with when evaluating their health. For example, a tree kangaroo with a sore leg still needs to exhibit natural behaviors and must climb in order to be comfortable. That means we have to keep the animal somewhere where it can climb while we are treating the injury. Another challenge is staying current in all areas of veterinary medicine because we're learning so much all the time.

WPZ: What is the most interesting operation you've performed at the zoo?

Dr. Darin: I think it was Nadiri's [western lowland gorilla] birth. It was a difficult birth so Jumoke, the mom, had to be brought to the zoo's animal hospital for the delivery. It was a rare opportunity to have zoo vets, zookeepers, and doctors from the community all helping Jumoke give birth to her first infant. I've drained an abscess from the eye of a poison dart frog. I once brought a tree kangaroo to a community hospital after hours for a CT scan to find an infection. The zoo doesn't have certain medical equipment which other members of the community can provide.

WPZ: What advice would you give to someone in school who is interested in becoming a veterinarian?

Dr. Darin: Meet a vet! Go talk to a local veterinarian and ask them for advice. Read books from the library, books about veterinary medicine and taking care of animals. Have a pet and become involved in its care. You can also develop great skills from activity clubs like Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H etc.

