

This is truly a fellowship of opportunity; the opportunity to travel abroad, expand my horizons and collaborate with colleagues in the UK. The lab animal industry has been very good to me over the years and this year is no exception. I can think of no better way to spend my first trip abroad than to share it with my colleagues in the lab animal science industry. I arrived in London very early morning March 29, 2014 and immediately set out on a sightseeing expedition while immersing myself in the culture and customs of the city and country. The first two days of the fellowship I had a fabulous time touring London via the hop on hop off bus and underground tube. After a few close calls with the new traffic patterns I was soon a pro at zipping around the city! Over the course of the following week I visited several facilities in and around London, Cambridge, and Salisbury. I was warmly received at each and met with enthusiasm and an eagerness to share and show off their facilities, research and accomplishments. Through conversations with facility managers and technicians I was able to gain a better understanding of animal welfare, best practices, facility operations, research trends and public outreach in the UK. These experiences led up to and ended with attending the IAT Congress in the Northwest of England.

My week began with a quick underground trip arriving at the MRC National Institute for Medical Research in Mill Hill. Once through security I was given a warm welcome followed by an introduction to the facility, a bit of their history, and research goals. The NIMR has a rich history of scientific achievements in neuroscience, immunology, stem cell research and basic sciences, and is home to several Nobel laureates. NIMR is largely supported by the MRC (Medical Research Council) a national organization funded by tax payer contributions that provide research to improve the health of the British public. Even though this site is steeped in tradition and nestled in a lovely country setting a more modern facility awaits them in the bustling city of London. The race is on for the rederivation of every transgenic line supported at the NIMR for relocation to the new facility. I learned a new tradition at NIMR that was reinforced at each subsequent facility I visited and that is conversation over tea! I hope to incorporate this into my own routines as it just helps set the mood for dialogue and healthy exchange.

Introduction to the facility began by way of a shower and a set of new “paper” undergarments and scrubs. This was a new experience, but once on the other side of the barrier a very familiar world of IVC’s, cage changing schedules, autoclaves and colonies of transgenic animals for as far as the eye could see was very familiar indeed! I felt right at home even though several thousand miles away from the facility I call home. The animal facility and cryopreservation unit staff were extremely patient with me as I shadowed them in their daily activities. I gained a new perspective and insight by realizing the similarities and subtle differences of animal care in the UK vs US. Although the laws and regulations are a bit different between the US and UK we both achieve the same goal at the end of the day: to ensure humane care and welfare of the laboratory animals in our charge.

By day four I was off to Cambridge via rail. The train stations are bustling with activity, most travelers nervously checking the posted train schedules so as not to miss their ride. Once the train is ready to board it’s off to the races to get a good spot on the rail! Then the pace changes a bit to a wonderful relaxed journey filled with fields of yellow grape seed and spotted ponies. First stop, the prestigious Sanger Institute, world renowned for genomic research and funded by the Wellcome Trust, the largest

private charity in Europe. This spacious campus is home of the largest computer system in Europe containing genomic sequencing data. The atmosphere is quite unique in that it is a cross of Pharma and University, fostering joint academic network data sharing between universities. After a nice cup of tea and introductions I was able to tour the campus including the aquatics and quarantine facilities. The aquatics facility was most impressive and it was a pleasure meeting with the staff as they are keenly in tune to the needs of the colony and committed to excellence. Equally impressive is the colony management software used to track the inventory and breeding colonies of some 15,000 cages. Training, competency and documentation are as important in the UK as the US. Meeting with the Named Training Competency officer afforded both of us an opportunity to discuss the similarities, differences and best practices in tracking and ensuring competency. After a lovely lunch in the cafeteria the day concluded with a tour of the quarantine facility and a lengthy discussion of emergency contingency planning.

Another wonderful day in Cambridge, (actually I was blessed with beautifully mild weather the entire trip), takes me to the MRC – Babraham Research Campus. Over morning tea we discussed the research goals of the campus, molecular biology and transgenic rodent production, followed by a tour of the newly occupied facility. After lunch I was then able to share our experiences during Hurricane Katrina with the entire staff at their regularly scheduled “Tea Talk.” I was thrilled with the opportunity of giving back in this small way as everyone was so eager to share with me. The day concluded with a tour of Cambridge, dinner at a local restaurant and a few pints at the Eagle Pub! So much history, so little time!

My last day in Cambridge began on the main campus of Cambridge University, Department of Physiology, Neuroscience and Development. This was a unique opportunity and a bit of a change of pace from rodents to farm animals and avian species. Our day began with a quick overview of the Department and facilities followed by a tour of the University Farm, Avian Facility and Veterinary College. The highlights of the day included observing the trials and tribulations of establishing a colony of California Scrub Jays at the aviary and interacting with a marmoset colony at the Veterinary College. The day concluded with a train ride to Grately and a wonderful Indian dinner.

Day Seven began in the countryside of Salisbury near Stonehenge at the Center for Macaques (CFM). This primate facility, a very successful macaque breeding facility, supplies well socialized macaques to the research facilities in the UK. The CFM is largely funded by the MRC. I was most impressed with the natural housing of these primates in large group housing rooms equipped with natural enrichment devices to climb on and forage through. The animal care staff is very dedicated to the wellbeing of the animals they work with and this is quite evident in the relaxed manner in which they carry out their daily duties, the ease in which they interact with the primates and low staff turnover rate. Great attention is given to the construction of elaborate enrichment; my favorites include the foraging material and the pulley mirror system in each room. The macaques are able to operate the mirrors to see who is walking through the corridors and to playfully move you out of their field of view if they so desire!

The day concluded with travel by rail back to London for a few days of relaxation and sightseeing. A chance conversation with my taxi driver presented the opportunity to fulfill a bucket list item – horse racing in England! I had a wonderful day at the track, but the bookies had a better day than I! Sunday I

spent the day touring the tower of London, viewing the crown jewels and an organ recital and Mass at Westminster Abbey.

Monday morning I was back to business with a quick tube ride over to Farringdon to meet with the staff of Understanding Animal Research. Over tea we discussed best practices in animal research and outreach. This organization works tirelessly to increase public awareness of the importance of animal research and to gain public support of research in both the UK and US. Much like Americans for Medical Progress and the Foundation for Biomedical Research they track anti-vivisection activities and lobby in support of research. It is not uncommon for this tiny staff to reach out to approximately 9000 students per year through some 300 school engagements and is always at the ready to assist researchers when targeted by anti-research groups. At the moment the UAR is heavily involved in the implementation of the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK. This agreement commits to when, how and why animals are used in research, enhanced communication with the public and media regarding animals in research, proactive action in providing opportunities for the public to find out about research using animals and provide animal progress reports. This will educate the public on animal research so that they can debate the issues from a position of knowing the facts, and enable them to make up their own minds on animal research. The latest public poll indicates 80-85% of the UK public supports research.

Next and final stop—the IAT Congress. The meeting in the Northwest of England was a grand experience and I was happy to see the familiar smiles of my new friends in attendance. Particularly memorable was the chance to meet the UK Fellowship recipient and swapping stories of both our experiences! The IAT Congress resembles a mini-National AALAS meeting affording the members an opportunity to network while attending numerous platform sessions, poster presentations, workshops, vendor interaction and social functions. I was most impressed with the first time presenter sessions and applauded all as I know how difficult it can be the first time at the podium. What a lovely vehicle for folks to gain valuable experience and confidence in presenting their new ideas and passions. The meeting concluded with a lovely formal Gala filled with great food, conversation, music and dancing; an exceptionally charming end to a remarkable experience.

Lastly, there are a few moments in your life that are truly momentous and forever memorable. The AAALAC Fellowship is certainly a pinnacle point in my career and I will always cherish this experience and all those that made it possible. I encourage all to apply to become the next UK or US recipient for it is certainly a career enhancing opportunity.