The human animal bond

The human animal bond is well known to be an essential part of human society and as vets, we are lucky enough to witness its influence on a daily basis. It is often the best part of the job even though at times it can switch to heart breaking. However, we keep moving forward because we know how special these bonds are and how lucky we are to have such amazing connections with animals and people alike.

Animal encounters and associations come in many forms, not limited to companion animals, working teams, competition animals, conservation icons and the abundance of wildlife that surrounds us. I've been lucky enough to be surround by animals my whole life and I have worked with many different zoo, aquarium and wildlife species. I hope that by sharing my experience with working with dolphins, I might be able to spark an interest in the 'One Health, One Welfare' initiative, which aims to achieve optimal health outcomes by recognizing the interconnection between people, animals, plants and their shared environment.

Dolphins are a highly intelligent and social species, passing on culture through many generations all whilst constantly adapting to their environment. Working with dolphins taught me a lot about community, friendship, leadership and family. I saw unrelated females helping new mums raise their young. Witnessed every dolphin having a different personality and changing behaviours with their mood or the state of their friendship with another dolphin. I saw trainers' personalities meld into the personality of the dolphin they were assigned to care for and similarly I saw the personality of dolphins' meld into that of their trainers. With such complex behaviour, came the requirement for in depth and advanced training and enrichment techniques that would be varied on a daily basis. Mornings would start with a swim to clean all the pools and the beach, followed by calling all the dolphins for a morning check-up and breakfast. They would then get social play time before guests arrived to meet them and learn about their biology and behaviour. I believe every person that came through, left more educated about dolphins and the marine environment which I hoped encouraged them to care more about the natural world and consider things like reducing plastic usage, recycling and buying sustainable fish.

There is no doubt that animals in captivity raise questions about welfare.

However, questions are always a good thing!

In an ideal world, the ocean would be clean, free of plastic and full of fish frolicking in a diverse ecosystem. There are natural threats to all marine life but in today's society the human impact outplays any other natural threat. I believe that losing more of the natural world is detrimental to our health as a human species and truly see our human health to be inexorably linked to the health of all other species. For this reason, I believe there is a place for rescued animals to have the opportunity to live out their lives in a safe environment. This need will continue to exist whilst we continue with unsustainable practices, and the longer we do so the more species and animals will need support.

We are so lucky to have our pets to keep us mentally and physically healthy. We are so lucky to have a world full of weird and wonderful animals to help keep our brains full of questions and our ecosystem thriving. Every animal, every person has a place and I think, when we work together and for each other, we can make the earth such an amazing place to live!

I'd love to have a chat with anyone about their experiences with animals and always love to share my many stories about my days with dugongs, seals and dolphins ☺ .

Dr Suead