

VOLUNTEER VET – TESTIMONIAL

Susan Bird
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I had two and a half weeks left of annual leave from work so I decided to put them to good use and sign up for neutering trip through [Worldwide Veterinary Services](#). I read several reports on the website and immediately liked the sound of MAWS in Botswana.

I arrived on Sunday evening in Maun after a two day trip from England. The very welcoming and enthusiastic Jude met me at the airport. She dropped me off at my accommodation for the duration of my stay; a beautiful thatched house next to the river in Maun. The owners of the house were on holiday for a few weeks and very kindly allowed the visiting volunteers of MAWS to house sit whilst they were away. The house was spacious with a swimming pool and a well cared for garden. They had three dogs who were wonderful company. In particular the lovely Jack Russell Nala, who doubled up as snake detector and alerted us to the presence a cobra in the garden a couple of times!

After a day getting acquainted with the clinic and the area, I started work on Tuesday. The clinic is very well set up with separate prep and operating tables. It was all very clean and tidy with kits already made up and set out and a good selection of suture materials (some are bought by the charity and some are donated). I had brought a considerable amount of suture material, micropore tape, bandages, catheters and the like with me from the UK. This donation was partly from The Veterinary Hospital Group, Plymouth where I work and partly from a client who donated a large amount of bandage material.

I worked alongside several staff at the clinic, some permanent, and some visiting volunteers like myself. Gwen, committee member for MAWS, is in charge of stock checks and bookkeeping. She also cleaned and packed all the kits every day and helped out with things like anaesthetic top-ups when required. Cephas, a permanent employee, is a very capable and skilled veterinary nurse. He organises the premeds, catheterises the dogs and clips and preps the dogs for surgery. Nation, also a permanent employee, coordinates picking up the dogs and taking them home after they have recovered.

Visiting volunteers included Charlotte, a trained veterinary nurse from the UK, and Gwen, a Dutch human nurse. Kate, a veterinary surgeon from the UK, was also there for part of the time.

We started work at 8am and worked through to about 3pm each day. We operated on approximately 6 dogs per vet, per day. The anaesthetic protocol consists of an intramuscular xylazine premed, followed up by IM ketamine 10 minutes later. Most dogs were heavily sedated on this mixture. Each dog was then catheterised and received IV diazepam before intubation. If required the dogs received top-ups with either IV ketamine/diazepam mix or thiopentone. Dogs were maintained on total intravenous anaesthesia as there was no inhalational anaesthesia available. Once anaesthetised, each dog received a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory injection, ivermectin, rabies and routine vaccinations for distemper, parvo, hepatitis etc.

The patients are prepped with electric clippers and chlorhexidine then placed in troughs made from drain pipes fixed to planks of wood. These troughs were surprisingly useful and also made it easier to carry the anaesthetised dogs from the prep table to the operating table.

Fortunately the clinic has air conditioning as it is warm in Botswana especially under the heat of the operating lamps!

Any patient that appeared at increased risk from the anaesthetic, for example malnourished patients or heavily pregnant bitches, was placed on IV fluids throughout the procedure. On the whole the anaesthetics were smooth and the recoveries were excellent. On recovery each dog was sprayed with fly repellent and wound spray. We also clipped their nails and checked for TVTs (transmissible venereal tumours), which were treated with vincristine. Initially the dogs recovered on blankets in the corner of the clinic; when they were ready to stand they were moved to two large outdoor communal pens. All the dogs appeared very comfortable afterwards and were on their feet by late afternoon.

I owe special thanks to MAWS committee member Tana Hutchings, who works at Wilderness Safaris. As a thank you for donating my time to volunteer for MAWS she organised a two day safari at Savuti Camp near the Okavango Delta for myself and Charlotte. We took a small aeroplane over the Delta to get to the camp. We received a warm welcome and were shown to our rooms overlooking the lake. The camp was beautiful, not only in setting but very luxurious. The food was excellent as well. Our safari guide and driver, Tank, successfully tracked leopards, cheetah and hyena for us. We also saw many elephants, hippos, impala, wart hogs, plenty of birds and also some baboons.

I had a very enjoyable time and look forward to returning again in the future.

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MAWS CLINIC



CHARLOTTE & CEPHAS

