

SJDAWC NEWS

NUMBER 47, 2026 SPRING EDITION

SIR JAMES DUNN ANIMAL WELFARE CENTRE *Atlantic Veterinary College, University of Prince Edward Island*



PROMOTING ANIMAL WELFARE THROUGH RESEARCH, SERVICE, AND EDUCATION



UNIVERSITY
of Prince Edward
ISLAND



STUDENTS PUTTING ANIMAL WELFARE INTO PRACTICE



Hayleigh Bursey and Emma Nauss were recently elected as the President and Vice-President of the AVC Animal Welfare Club, respectively. Over the last year, they have hosted lunch lectures on marine mammal welfare, rural area veterinary services, and animal enforcement and investigations in PEI. They also collaborated with the AVC Bovine Club for a lecture about the welfare of animals at slaughter and conducted a tour of the Atlantic Beef Products abattoir. In addition, the club has hosted a donation drive and helped launch an exotic animals foster program with the PEI Humane Society, and raised funds with the AVC Enrichment and Behaviour Club to purchase enrichment for the cows used for teaching at AVC.

In the future, Hayleigh intends to continue to work in the welfare sector of veterinary medicine and hopes to pursue her dream in shelter medicine. Emma aims to apply her knowledge across a diverse range of species to support rural communities in Nova Scotia, improving access to veterinary care and promoting animal welfare for pet owners.

Photo L to R: Emma Nauss, AVC Animal Welfare Club Vice-President (AVC Class of 2028) and Hayleigh Bursey, AVC Animal Welfare Club President (AVC Class of 2028)



The 11th annual SJDAWC webinar series explored the critical role veterinarians play in animal welfare cases. The webinars included the veterinarian's responsibilities in identifying, documenting, and assessing animal welfare concerns, as well as effectively communicating findings in a legal setting. We are grateful for funding from the Animal Welfare Foundation of Canada to support the series.



WE WELCOME FEEDBACK!

Please contact us at animalwelfare@upei.ca to receive the newsletter (in full colour) by email and to be added to our email list for occasional upcoming events.

To learn how you can support the Centre, please go to awc.upei.ca or write to:

The Sir James Dunn
Animal Welfare Centre

Atlantic Veterinary College

University of Prince Edward Island
550 University Avenue
Charlottetown, PEI, Canada
C1A 4P3

All donations are tax deductible.

MARCH 31 | WEBINAR 1

FROM CLINIC TO COURTROOM: RECOGNIZING AND REPORTING ANIMAL MALTREATMENT

In the first webinar, Dr. Shane Bateman, professor at the University of Guelph, introduced the idea that veterinarians serve as “sentinels”, or guardians who can spot trouble with animal welfare before many others. However, veterinarians are not responsible to serve as the “judge and jury” in these cases, but rather to be vigilant and report their concerns to appropriate authorities.



Shane provided a definition for animal maltreatment, a legal term which includes non-accidental injuries, neglect, sexual abuse, animal fighting, etc. He then shared tips for identifying non-accidental injuries using clinical signs in the animal (e.g., presence of multiple fractures at different stages of healing) as well as suspicious client behaviour (e.g., providing vague history or cannot explain injuries).

Shane ended the webinar by sharing reasons why veterinarians do not report their suspicions of animal maltreatment. These include a perceived lack of training about how to suspect maltreatment and a worry about being sued. However, the bottom line is that if veterinarians have reasonable grounds to believe that there is animal maltreatment, they have the obligation to report these suspicions.

APRIL 7 | WEBINAR 2

FROM OBSERVATION TO EVIDENCE: EFFECTIVE RECORD KEEPING IN ANIMAL WELFARE ASSESSMENTS



In the second webinar, Dr. Kathleen MacMillan, associate professor at the University of Prince Edward Island, shared recommendations for effective record keeping in animal welfare cases. Kathleen began by describing how veterinarians play different roles in animal welfare cases, including reporting concerns or being contacted to help with a case by the department of agriculture, the humane society, or police enforcement.

Kathleen explained that veterinarians should rely on documentation, and not on their memory alone. Poor and incomplete records could lead to animals not receiving appropriate care or not being removed from situations where they are being maltreated. Documentation should be objective (e.g., what you see, without assumptions), accurate (e.g., precise measurements or details), consistent (e.g., all the facts align and do not contradict each other), and complete (e.g., a full picture including the animal and their environment).

Kathleen explained that veterinarians should document details about the animals, the environment, a timeline, and any interactions or statements from the owner. She ended by describing how veterinarians can create effective reports by using Codes of Practice where available and encouraged participants to be confident as the experts in animal care.

APRIL 14 | WEBINAR 3

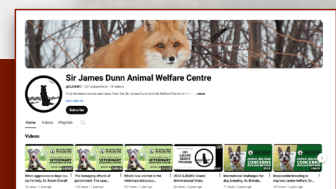
DISCHARGING YOUR DUTY AS AN EXPERT WITNESS



The final webinar was presented by Janine Kidd, Senior Crown Attorney at the Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service. Janine started off by preparing veterinarians for what it means to be an expert witness and what to expect if they take the stand in a court case.

Janine explained that veterinarians may be called to testify in a trial, during sentencing, seizure, and appeal of an animal welfare case. As an expert witness, veterinarians bring knowledge that the court and judge are missing. This includes animal health and husbandry, diagnosis, prognosis and treatment of diseases or injuries, and determining the cause of death in animals.

Janine explained that a veterinarian's duty as an expert witness is to the court, not to the lawyer who called them, the Humane Society, or the animal. That duty includes telling the truth, being impartial and objective, acting independently and relying on your own judgement, as well as being unbiased and not favouring one side's position over the other.



To view previous webinars, please visit our YouTube channel at www.upei.ca/youtube/awc

For information about where to report concerns animal maltreatment:

<https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/veterinary-resources/provincial-abuse-reporting-requirements/>

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SJDAWC

SJDAWC TO HOST FIRST HACKATHON IN FALL 2026



We are excited to announce that the SJDAWC will be hosting its first Animal Welfare Hackathon in Fall 2026.

What is a Hackathon, you ask? Modelled after an Animal Health Hackathon at Cornell University, this three-day (Friday–Sunday) event will involve students forming interdisciplinary teams to resolve real-world animal welfare challenges. Teams will consist of veterinary students mixed with students from business, computer science, engineering, and other disciplines across UPEI. Teams will work with industry and veterinarian mentors to present their ideas in front of a panel of judges for a chance to win a cash prize. Stay tuned to find out more.

CZERWINSKI BENEFITS FROM 2025–2026 TRAVEL AWARD

Emily Czerwinski received a SJDAWC student travel award for an external rotation to Meru, Kenya. Most of her time was dedicated to learning about and promoting donkey welfare with Dr. Martha Mellish through community education seminars, walk-in health clinics, and harness workshops.

Emily and her team conducted owner seminars centered on donkey welfare that highlighted ways to improve current harnessing and cart design. During health clinics, the team provided vaccinations, deworming, and dental floating while reinforcing low-stress handling techniques. A key intervention was teaching owners to avoid ear twisting, a common restraint technique used. Instead of ear twisting, Emily and the team explained to owners how to make rope halters and work slowly with their donkeys.

Emily learned her favourite Swahili phrase, “pole pole,” which translates to “slowly” and she repeated it countless times throughout the health clinic days. The team also taught owners how to tie bowline knots to prevent leg lacerations, a current issue with the slip knot that is tied around the donkey’s legs.

“It became clear to me that over the last three years, Dr. Mellish and her team have been improving the welfare of donkeys in the area,” Emily shared. “It is a slow change in the way that people are caring for their donkeys, but it is impactful and relies on the community.”



Photo: Emily Czerwinski with a donkey foal.

“I hope to be able to return in the future to Meru and continue to help work on the betterment of donkey welfare in the area.”

—Emily Czerwinski, Class of 2026

PROJECTS FUNDED IN 2026

Each year, the SJDAWC provides funding to support projects that aim to improve the lives of animals. For 2026, five projects were funded, covering diverse topics related to animal welfare. To learn more about this funding opportunity, visit our website at awc.upei.ca/grant-competition/

INVESTIGATING THE USE OF PREGABALIN AS AN ANXIOLYTIC MEDICATION IN HOSPITALIZED HORSES

A. Butler, A. Hamza, A. Doyle, S. Hamilton, M. Saab



The aim of this new research project is to evaluate whether pregabalin, a medication for pain and anxiety, can be used to reduce stress in hospitalized horses. This research supports a humane approach to equine veterinary care centered around improved welfare and clinical outcomes in hospitalized horses.

MEDICAL AND SURGICAL CARE OF HOMELESS SMALL ANIMALS

A. Ogilvie, P. Foley, R. MacLean, M. MacLean, L. Ellis



This renewed service project will identify homeless animals who require medical or surgical care, develop treatment plans, and to provide care. Following care, these animals are adopted by community members. This project is also supported by the PEI Humane Society.

INVESTIGATING STRESS IN TEACHING HORSES AND THE DVM STUDENT EXPERIENCE DURING VETERINARY TEACHING LABORATORIES AT THE ATLANTIC VETERINARY COLLEGE

M. Mellish, A. Butler, K. Stewart, A. Hossain



This new research project will measure stress in 13 horses used for teaching at AVC during teaching procedures. Stress will be assessed using natural stress hormones produced in saliva, heart rate variability, and a behavioural scoring system. This research will provide practical recommendations to improve equine welfare in veterinary education.

FARMER-TO-FARMER FORUMS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL HOUSING FOR DAIRY CALVES

C. Ritter, K. Koralesky, S. McKenna, N. Tedford, J. Dillman, N. McKillop



This new research project will support farmers through farmer-to-farmer forums, where those already using social housing share successful practices. A cohort of farmers in the process of implementing social housing will also receive peer support and resources.

IMPROVING DIARRHETIC BEEF CALF WELFARE BY INTEGRATING OPTIMIZED HUSBANDRY PRACTICES WITH METAGENOMIC INSIGHTS

J. Stull, J. McClure, L. Ayalew, R. Meagher



The goal of this new research project is to improve and expand understanding of the welfare of diarrhetic beef calves, explore the insights that the gut microbiome provides to assessing welfare, and identify modifiable practices to improve beef calf welfare.

For more information about previously funded projects, please visit our website: awc.upei.ca/list-of-all-funded-projects/

AVC VETERINARY STUDENTS SHINE AT ANIMAL WELFARE ASSESSMENT CONTEST

The AVC sent ten veterinary students and four graduate students to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Animal Welfare Assessment contest in November 2025. The contest was held at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, USA. A total of 188 students participated representing 23 universities across North America.

The AVC teams brought home four awards, including placing third and fourth place overall in the veterinary division, fourth place overall in the graduate division, and first place individual (Megan Guptill).

Students were split into three teams: Veterinary Team 1 included Abigail Fraser, Seth Karg, Megan Guptill, Lauren Steele, and Alexa Roussac; Veterinary Team 2 included Abigail Leblanc, Charisma Farrell, Emeline Lejeune, and Madison Kane; Graduate Team 1 included Tunmise (Faith) Ehigbor, Morgan MacInnis, Aiman Khattak, and Gustavo Dias.

This year's contest consisted of three individual animal welfare assessments and a team scenario. The species that were assessed in individual scenarios were snakes in zoos, dressage horses, and pet gerbils. Each scenario was presented live, followed by a period of time to allow students to submit their choice of which animal had better welfare. Each student then prepared a three-minute oral presentation defending their choice,



Back row (L-R): Madison Kane, Emeline Lejeune, Abigail Fraser, Seth Karg, Abigail Leblanc, Alexa Roussac, Katie Smith, Tunmise (Faith) Ehigbor.

Front row (L-R): Gustavo Dias, Lauren Steele, Megan Guptill, Charisma Farrell, Morgan MacInnis, Aiman Khattak.

including the positive and negative aspects of each scenario and suggestions for how to improve the animals' welfare. Students also participated in a team welfare assessment of tilapia aquaculture. Each team visited an aquaculture facility and were then allotted 10 minutes to defend their reasoning to a panel of animal welfare experts.

Students were also given the opportunity to network with other students and experts in the field of animal welfare. Lauren Steele stated that the contest "helped highlight the opportunities in animal welfare within veterinary medicine." Alexa Roussac noted that the contest "allowed me to think on the fly and meet new colleagues in the field."

The students' success was supported by generous funding from the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre and the AVMA. Special thanks were extended to their coach, Dr. Katy Proudfoot.

"This contest helped my confidence and communication skills in a way that was relevant to veterinary medicine."

—Charisma Farrell, Class of 2029

AWARDS

2026 SJDAWC VETERINARY SUMMER AWARDS

Congratulations to Skyeler Webb and Geoff Chase for receiving the 2026 SJDAWC Veterinary Summer Research Awards.

Skyeler Webb, AVC Class of 2029

Skyeler's project will explore cardiovascular health associated with athletic function in draft pulling horses. This research stems from the observation that sudden collapse or death in equine athletes is a highly emotional occurrence with significant consequences to the horses' health, handlers' safety, and the public's perception of welfare during equestrian sporting events.

She will have the opportunity to travel to draft horse events throughout the summer and observe physical examinations, jugular venipuncture, and cardiology test analysis.

Skyeler is honoured to have received this award and looks forward to working with her supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Burns.



Skyeler Webb



Geoff Chase

Geoff Chase, AVC Class of 2028

Geoff's project will assess the impact of ultrasonic noise on lab animal welfare during development. This research analyzes how ultrasonic noise represents an additional stressor to lab animals within veterinary hospitals and shelters, and how this potentially extends to pets in the home.

He is excited to be a recipient of this award and looks forward to working with his supervisor, Dr. Paul Bernard.

"I am honoured to be a recipient of the SJDAWC VetSRA!" Geoff shared.

Skyeler and Geoff will also travel to Raleigh, North Carolina, in August to attend the 2026 Veterinary Scholars Symposium where they will represent the SJDAWC by each presenting a poster on their research.

"I am excited to conduct research this summer, working together with Dr. Paul Bernard, our lab group, and my bright peers in the VetSRA program to progress research dedicated to advancing the welfare of the animals we serve."

—Geoff Chase, Class of 2028

SJDAWC

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THANK YOU TO THE CHRISTOFOR AND THE SIR JAMES DUNN FOUNDATIONS

We gratefully acknowledge the sustained financial support of **The Christofor and The Sir James Dunn Foundations**, without which the SJDAWC would not exist.

We also thank Dr. Eric Butler and Ms. Suzanne Rocca-Butler, and the many generous organizations, individuals, veterinary hospitals, and other businesses—too numerous to mention—that have made donations in memory of a beloved pet. You can find a list of our donors on our webpage: awc.upei.ca/supporting-the-centre/

To learn how you can support the Centre, please check out our website.

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