

Veterinarian has taste for exotics

Written by MARK JAEGER

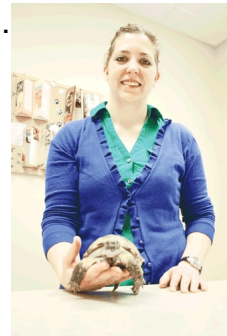
Wednesday, 06 March 2013 16:48

Saukville clinic caters to growing popularity of unusual household pets

It wasn't the prospect of being surrounded by cuddly puppies and kittens that attracted Rebecca Dallwig to the field of veterinary medicine.

Dallwig, who has been on the staff of the Saukville Veterinary Clinic since August, cares for her share of cats and dogs. But, she is looking to make a niche for herself as a specialist in exotic pets.

"I think exotics are just interesting and very different. The birds can be very intelligent and social, and the reptiles have such vivid coloring," Dallwig said.



A 2008 graduate of the University of Wisconsin Veterinary School in Madison, she got a big dose of exposure to exotic animals while serving a one-year internship at the San Diego Zoo. There she got to work with the large cats, bears, zebras "and just about everything else you could think of," she said.

That was followed by two years of additional training at the University of Illinois and the Chicago Zoological Society.

"I grew up outside of Madison, and we always had pets — fish, gerbils, guinea pigs and dogs," Dallwig said.

She said exotic pets are becoming increasingly popular, but that Noah's Ark variety of animals poses a challenge for local veterinarians.

"Veterinarians love animals, but not everyone has the expertise required to provide the proper care for exotics. It takes a considerable amount of additional training to know how to do things properly, like drawing blood from a parakeet that has such a small amount of blood," Dallwig said.

"Amazing advances are being made in veterinary care, just as in medicine for people, which requires constant updating. Luckily, I am very interested in learning more about these animals. I don't think I'll ever stop learning."

Dallwig said lack of education is the main reason many exotic pets — such as lizards or tropical

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birds — become sick.

“Many pet owners are very well meaning, but these pets require very specific care in terms of what they eat, how much light they get and what temperature they are kept to. When those requirements aren’t met, the animals get sick and that is often where the vet comes in,” she said.

To assist in the educational process, the vet clinic offers a variety of tips on the care of exotic pets and birds at its website — www.saukvillevet.com.

Dallwig said being a specialist in the care of exotic pets may mean she will need to make more house calls than other vets.

“If someone has a sick chicken, and they are becoming increasingly popular as house pets, the owner may bring it in. If more than one bird needs care, however, I’ll probably have to go to see them,” she said.

A similar scenario is likely to come into play if pygmy goats or potbellied pigs need medical attention.

Having already been exposed to the life of a zoo veterinarian, Dallwig said she is confident she will be content being a small town vet.

“I like the variety of work a veterinary clinic presents. Every job has its bad days, but then I get to be involved in things like taking care of a new litter of puppies,” Dallwig said.

“Big zoos have their own challenges compared to working at a private practice.”

Image Information: VETERINARIAN REBECCA DALLWIG spent a little one-on-one time with Ivan, a Russian tortoise, at the Saukville Veterinary Clinic.

Photo by Mark Jaeger