64th AALAS National Meeting

27–31 OCTOBER 2013

Baltimore Convention Center
Baltimore, MD
Attendees: 4,823
Exhibiting companies: 287

The 64th annual meeting of the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS) brought thousands of animal research professionals to 'Charm City' for education, collaboration and networking opportunities. This year's program included four special topic lectures by appropriately charismatic speakers. Though the topics of some lectures fell outside the scope of laboratory animal science, strictly speaking, they were no less popular among attendees.

Keynote Speaker Spencer Wells addressed the audience during the Opening General Session on Sunday, October 27. Wells, a population geneticist and National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence, discussed the Genographic Project, a research initiative to unravel the story of human history and migration carried in our own DNA. Wells has traveled around the globe, obtaining cheek-swab samples from indigenous populations in central Asia, western Africa, the Pacific islands and elsewhere. In the Genographic Project, these samples are sequenced and analyzed to create a 'map' of genetic markers that Wells and his team are using to draw a picture of human travel routes. Also as part of the Project, Wells is actively recruiting members of the public to contribute their own cheek-swab samples for analysis. For those who have wondered just how closely they may be related to their Neanderthal ancestors, here is a chance to find out. Wells himself carries 2.1% Neanderthal DNA, and 2013 AALAS President Kim Saunders revealed that she has 1.4% Neanderthal DNA (*LAS Pro.* **1**, 21; 2013).

Brent Whitaker delivered the Charles C. Hunter Lecture on Monday, October 28, highlighting several notable animals he has worked with during his 24-year career as a veterinarian at the National Aquarium in Baltimore. Many of these cases involve rescued wild animals, like 'Inky,' the first pygmy sperm whale to be successfully rescued, rehabilitated and released. Inky was stranded on the New Jersey shore on Thanksgiving Day in 1993. She was rescued and transported to the Aquarium, where she lived for six months and underwent six procedures to remove plastic debris that had filled her stomach, preventing her from feeding. After her rehabilitation, she was released and tracked for several days. During her residency at the Aquarium and subsequent release, Whitaker and his colleagues learned much about the physiology and ecology of a very poorly understood species. He also described some of the creative approaches that his staff has used to facilitate caring for some of the more exotic and challenging animals housed at the Aquarium. For example, one aquarist trained an electric eel to enter a net and be removed from its home tank without discharging its 500-volt shock, a benefit to both eel and handler! Similarly, 'Margaret,' the aquarium's hyacinth macaw, is trained to "go to sleep," lying still on her back while a caretaker gently swaddles her and administers a sedative. Both 'tricks' enable veterinarians to complete routine health checks quickly and safely.

On Tuesday, October 29, Wallace P. Rowe Lecturer Janice Clements described how macaques with simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) have been used as a model for research on human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Clements and her team have gained insights into the mechanisms of early viral infection and immune signaling in the brain from studying the SIV-infected macaques. They have also investigated the use of combined antiretroviral therapy in the macaques to suppress viral replication and eradicate reservoirs of latent virus in blood and tissues. Clements hopes that the results of these studies one day may lead to a cure for AIDS.

Meanwhile, down the hallway, Kathryn Chapman gave the Charles River Ethics and Animal Welfare Lecture on the importance of the principles of the 3Rs (replacement, refinement and reduction of animal use in research) in guiding the use of animals during drug development. Chapman brings together expert working groups, specializing in topics such as regulatory toxicology, monoclonal antibody production and acute toxicity, to support the sharing of data and experience in order to identify and promote opportunities to minimize animal use in the pharmaceutical industry.

Other meeting highlights included the introduction of Scott Mischler as the 2014 AALAS President in a gavel ceremony during the General Membership Meeting on Monday, October 28. Kim Saunders became Past-President, Cindy Buckmaster became Vice President and Laura Conour joined the 2014 AALAS officers as Vice President-Elect.