

AQUAVET I Experience Report

Josh Zlotnick

Hello my name is Josh Zlotnick and I am a rising 3rd year at NC State University College of Veterinary Medicine in Raleigh, North Carolina. I am extremely grateful for the support from the AAFV scholarship to attend AQUAVET I from May 27th – June 23rd at Roger Williams University in Bristol, Rhode Island. I would like to detail some of my experiences here as the AQUAVET I program showed me that a career in aquatic animal medicine is indeed possible.

As many know AQUAVET I is an intensive 4-week program covering all aspects of aquatic animal medicine. My specific interest has always been in fish medicine ever since I was a student at the Duke University Marine Laboratory and so the aquaculture aspects of the course were particularly appealing for me. The first week of the course opened my eyes to aquatic invertebrate medicine and shellfish aquaculture, a completely new field to me. The middle two weeks of the course focused mainly on fish medicine. I could not get enough of the lectures on tropical aquaculture, catfish, coldwater fish diseases, pet fish cases, aquaculture economics, and the like. I was presented with a comprehensive introduction to the aquaculture industry from a veterinary perspective and an understanding of the breadth of material to learn. In the final week, we learned about marine mammal medicine, which was very interesting given my background interning at The Marine Mammal Center. Overall, more than forty lecturers provided us students with great resources and networking opportunities.

Labs at AQUAVET I helped me build and improve on skills that will be very useful in the future. We are very lucky at NC State to have amazing aquatic animal veterinarians like Drs. Stoskopf, Lewbart, and Harms, who organize many aquatic animal medicine opportunities. In this way necropsies on birds, turtles, marine mammals, and fish were for me a second or third time experience. Likewise, the striped bass surgery was another chance to practice my skills in fish surgery and anesthesia. I was able to help guide the first year students this time around as I felt comfortable with the procedures and the anatomy. The water quality and microbiology labs were also very helpful in assimilating these important topics.

Interspersed between days full of lectures and labs were field trips to many of the aquatic animal institutions in the region. We spent a day each at New England, Long Island, and Mystic aquariums getting behind the scenes tours and conversing with their veterinary staff. The trip to the Sandwich Fish Hatchery on Cape Cod was particularly enlightening as we learned about their water system, the trout production cycle, and diseases of concern.

I think one of the most important things I learned at AQUAVET I was from a classmate who taught me to have an insatiable curiosity for everything and anything in this field. New venipuncture site for Batoids presented at IAAAM in Long Beach, California? We should try it on this cadaver! How many different eyeballs can we examine under the dissecting microscope? Let us find out! We spent many hours playing around with a \$14 endoscope that attaches to a



Striped Bass Surgery - Splenectomy and Ovariectomy

smartphone, trying to learn anatomy in situ and even practicing procedures like ovariectomies in turtles. Spending time with someone who wants to try new techniques for the sake of trying them, and is truly curious about the minutiae of every anatomical structure made me realize that a healthy curiosity is a key to becoming a competent and adaptable clinician.

I can without a doubt say that AQUAVET I was an amazing foundation for a career in aquatic animal medicine. My goal is to serve as a veterinarian in the aquaculture industry ideally working with food fish. Following AQUAVET I with an internship at Kennebec River Biosciences, an aquaculture diagnostics laboratory in Richmond, Maine made me realize how much I learned this past month and is continuously reinforcing the lecture material through real world application. In the first week alone I read slides to look for Whirling Disease, took samples to test for Bacterial Kidney Disease, listened in on a client consultation about a potential *Flavobacterium columnaris* infection, and much more. AQUAVET I gave me the foundation, resources, and the network to propel my career in aquatic animal medicine and I am very grateful for this scholarship that helped make attending it possible.



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