

In 2016, Dr. Rob Weichbrod reached out and asked if my institution would be willing to host the Institute of Animal Technology (IAT) registered AAALAC International Fellow from the United Kingdom (UK) for a day. I agreed, and for the past ten years, as part of the Janelia Research Campus (Janelia) for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, I have continued to organize the visit at Janelia for the IAT AAALAC International Fellowship recipient. It has always been one of my favorite days of the year, meeting a new colleague from “across the pond” and providing an opportunity for the Vivarium team to have a shared learning experience with the Fellow comparing how both organizations and countries approach scientific research that involves animals.

In 2025, after contemplating it for a few years, I decided to apply for the AAALAC Fellowship as a potential American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS) /Canadian Association for Laboratory Animal Science (CALAS) registered candidate and was honored to be the recipient and selected to travel to the UK in early 2026.

While preparing for my trip, I was able to express my interests and specify what I wanted to explore at each institution. My main areas of focus included aquatics, cage wash, unique species, and opportunities to speak with researchers. I also volunteered to present either formally or informally about how the Janelia Vivarium supports researchers at these institutions, reflecting the same request I've made of IAT Fellows visiting Janelia. The planning process was exceptionally smooth thanks to the outstanding support from the AAALAC Executive Office Staff, the IAT Office, and the host institutions' contacts. Their efforts ensured I was well-prepared for an excellent two-week experience.



***Different vendor stalls at Borough Market***

I arrived in London on a Saturday morning and while waiting for my hotel room to be ready, I took the opportunity to explore the city. My first stop, coffee! I found a small espresso bar in the St. Pancras train station, home of the Eurostar, which is the high-speed train connecting London and Paris. Fun fact: the exterior of the train station and connected hotel was used in the Harry Potter movies to represent the outside of the Kings Cross station, the location of Platform 9 3/4 !

My wife and I had traveled to London once before, so I wanted to explore some different areas, and walked to Borough Market. I have always enjoyed these types of markets after exploring Reading Terminal Market while spending a few years in Philadelphia. I continued walking and found an old pub to get a beer and some fish and chips for lunch, a nice classic meal for my first day in the UK. After lunch, I found my way walking through the West End on my way back to the hotel. This is London's version of Broadway. After an overnight flight and eight miles of walking, I was sufficiently tired and called it a night after getting checked into my room. On Sunday, I did a little less exploring, as I was still wrapping up my talk for the IAT Congress, but I did take an opportunity to go back to the West End and see a show.



Monday, I had a short walk from the hotel to [The Francis Crick Institute](#), where I was greeted by an IAT registered AAALAC International Fellow who was awarded the Fellowship and visited Janelia in 2017. The Crick, as it's informally called, houses mice,



ferrets, opossums, and fish, and had established partnerships between six different research institutions in the UK. Having spent the past 20 years focused on mice, rats, and zebrafish, I loved seeing the care and housing of other species. The ferrets were especially interesting as they are part of a flu vaccine research program that helps inform the World Health

Organization (WHO) on which flu strains should be included in vaccine development. The cage wash facility was impressive with two large robotic systems, which was necessary for a facility that has approximately 30,000 microisolator cages. From a research perspective, I was able to see the imaging and histopathology facilities, as well as talk to a neurobiology researcher studying instinctive behaviors, such as mating, parenting, and feeding. When walking through the mouse holding areas, it was exciting

to see how the institute supported the staff providing care for the animals. On each animal holding room, they list the name of the staff and the supervisor responsible for the room and they are given the title of Research Scientist and Research Officer, demonstrating the importance of these roles in the scientific process.

After visiting the Crick I left and took the train to Oxford where I stayed prior to visiting Oxford University on Tuesday. I started at the Old Road Campus where I saw both their mouse and zebrafish facilities. It was interesting to see their approach to a growing fish program and a decreasing mouse census in this building. They were able to establish procedures and a workflow to combine mice in the same room that required different levels of “barrier” protection. On the zebrafish side, the approach to enrichment was with varying types of plastic plants, to include a very effective sanitation program for items that may not tolerate a typical tank washing cycle. I then went to another facility where a wide variety of species were housed. The Djungarian hamsters were fascinating and although a relatively shy species, a few did peek out from their nests. This species goes through short periods of torpor, daily, making them an ideal model to understand the neuronal mechanisms of circadian rhythms. It had been twenty years since I last worked with non-human primates (NHPs), so, I was excited to see new housing environments, including bay windows from the housing room into the hallways that allowed the NHPs to see who was walking through the corridor. I wrapped up my time at Oxford with a great dinner at one of the historic pubs in Oxford with my hosts. While walking back to the hotel, I captured this picture of the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin, the official church of Oxford University, dating back to the 1200s.



On Wednesday morning, I traveled back to London to visit King’s College London. I had met my hosts last year as part of the AAALAC International Fellowship experience and the National AALAS Meeting in Long Beach, California, so it was great to reconnect on this trip. We started at the Genome Editing Embryology Core (GEEC) within the Maurice Wohl Clinical Neuroscience Institute, where I learned about creating new genetically modified mouse lines, as well as providing genome editing support of mouse and human stem cells, including Induced Pluripotent Stem Cells (iPSCs) and

patient derived samples. I then went through another rodent facility with where approximately 2,000 cages of mice were housed. After lunch, we took the London double-decker bus to the Guy's Campus where I toured and learned about the 3,000-tank zebrafish facility. I was impressed by the larval culture and the large spawning tanks of wild-type fish to generate sufficient embryos for microinjection. Through-out the day, I learned a lot about culture of care initiatives, including their "Hug in a Box" program. This program provides materials for individuals to create a box with a few items that were



*London Bridge at night.*

personalized to the person that will receive it, as a thank you or as an encouragement. We finished our walk around King's College, with a rare opportunity to visit the [Gordon Museum of Pathology](#), an amazing resource for medical training. As I walked through the museum, I thought of all the animals that had also played a role in the understanding and treatment of diseases. The day ended with a nice dinner overlooking London Bridge.

Thursday morning, I was up early and on the train to Cambridge, for the next two days. The first day was spent at the Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology (MRC-LMB), where I received a great introduction to the various projects the team had been involved with, many of which had been presented at local and national conferences. This included the use of ultrasound to detect pregnancy for time-pregnant female mice at early gestation, evaluating enrichment preferences of mice, and developing metrics to support technician led colony management to aid researchers in reducing the number of animals used each year. It was also amazing to see the focus on culture of care and openness, which were so interconnected. Some of the efforts related to openness led to the development of videos on the MRC-LMB YouTube and Facebook pages. There was a [great video of rat enrichment](#) on their Facebook page, which was cool to learn was in support of a former researcher at Janelia. In addition, there was a [YouTube video](#) that highlighted the staff that provided the care for the mice. The ability to be open about this work, provided the staff with the words and confidence to talk about what they do and the importance of this work in non-work settings. I also had the opportunity to talk to the leader of the cage wash area and realized that our facilities had the exact same robotic tunnel washer system, although theirs was two years newer. With both systems nearly 20 years old, we had a great conversation about what the future might look like for both facilities as we evaluate equipment replacement

and facility renovations.



Thursday evening, I had dinner with two previous AAALAC International Fellowship recipients. We had a great meal of fish and chips in a nice country pub! I was picked up Friday morning to visit a few different facilities at the University of Cambridge. We started at the farm site, which was a combination of historic and beautiful. Green pastures for horses and sheep, and a unique indoor setup for large animal surgeries. We then went to another site where they house and work with a variety of avian species, fish, and butterflies. The team was actively setting up space to house mockingbirds for an upcoming project. I had the opportunity to see Jays, a member of the corvid family, and experience their ability to mimic and repeat back sounds. There was a [great video](#) that describes some of the research, and introduces you to Romero, one of the Jays. I had the pleasure of hearing him say “I love you”, mimicking what was said to him. We left this facility and took a short detour to the Cambridge American Cemetery. This was where approximately 3,800 American soldiers from WWII are buried and another 5,100 names of soldiers who remain unaccounted for were inscribed. I had no idea this existed and it reminded me of Arlington National Cemetery in the United States. This was very meaningful as my grandfather was a pilot in World War II, at the age of 19.

After lunch, we went to the main campus and saw the marmoset facility. The variety of food and treats provided to the marmosets, reminded me that the staff who care for these species were also “chefs”, making sandwiches and foraging enrichment, in addition to caring for the animals.



Before leaving Cambridge Friday evening to go back to London, I had an opportunity to connect with a former Janelia researcher over a beer at the Cambridge train station. It was great to catch up and learn about her transition from research in the US to research in England. I returned to London for the weekend and for more exploration. On Saturday, I decided to get out of the city and ventured to the seaside town of Brighton.



*Walking path along the pebble beach of Brighton.*



*Ruins of an old Victorian pier.*

It was a beautiful day where I had an outdoor lunch and explored the Lanes, a twisting set of alleys that date back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. On Sunday, I wrapped up my presentation for the IAT Congress and prepared for the last facility visit on Monday.

Monday morning, I walked from the hotel to the Sainsbury Wellcome Center (SWC). This was a facility I didn't want to miss seeing due to the neuroscience research focus, which was the main type of research the Vivarium at Janelia had supported for the past 20 years. It was an opportunity to see technologies developed at Janelia in use in another facility and talk to researchers that spent time at Janelia as visiting scientists. As with most of the institutes I visited, SWC has a great public-facing website to share details about the care they provided to the animals, including [a video to show the process for cleaning the dirty cages in cage wash](#).



*Ducks and flowers in Regent's Park.*

As I left SWC, I walked to The Regent's Park to explore the gardens and reflect on what I had experienced in the UK over the past week. Key takeaways from the facility visits include the intersection of an organization's culture of care and openness initiatives. Together, not only did this improve the quality of the care the animals received, but it also provided a boost to the staff caring for these animals. As an industry, we have spent

many years not sharing what we do and for the front-line staff it can be challenging to know how to talk about their role. I know early in my career, I focused on the research that was being done, as I did not know how to talk about the animal work. As institutions talk more about the animal care portions of research, it provides staff with the permission and guidance on the language to use in their conversations about their job. Experiencing this early Spring beauty in The Regent's Park, I thought of the harmonious relationship between nature and those who nurture it. Just as the park flourishes through this symbiosis, so does scientific progress, fostered by the dedication of animal care professionals and the collaborative spirit of discovery.

On Tuesday morning, I left London and traveled to Wales for my first IAT Congress, which was held at the International Conference Center, next to the amazing Celtic Manor (site for the 2010 Ryder Cup for those golfers reading this). I loved this meeting, as there was a focus on technicians and lots of opportunities for networking, something I benefited from in my early career. It was a balanced mix of new technicians, senior technicians, managers, and directors, similar to how this is balanced within many of our facilities. I gave a talk titled "Built to Last" that reflected on key events of my career that influenced how the program at Janelia was built, as well as some of the inspiration for the upcoming book, "Fundamentals of Cage Wash Operations."

I am incredibly grateful to AAALAC International, the sponsors, and the hosts for this opportunity. I was able to reconnect with friends and colleagues, as well as make new ones. Around the world, the lab animal community was such a strong and close-knit group that welcomed each other with open arms. And it did not matter if you were new, had just met, hadn't seen each other in years, or talked every day, the camaraderie, encouragement, and shared experiences were always an anchor for these interactions. If you are AALAS/CALAS/IAT Certified and maintain your registry through continuing education, I strongly encourage you to apply for this amazing opportunity. You will not regret it!