

When my Director told me I had been selected for the AAALAC International Fellowship Award, I was in disbelief. The significance of the award alone was an incredible honour—but learning I was the first Canadian recipient made the moment even more meaningful.



My partner and I left Vancouver Island on Friday and arrived in London Saturday afternoon. That evening, we explored Camden Market, and on Sunday we dove into sightseeing: the Tower of London, Big Ben, Tower Bridge, Westminster Abbey, a boat tour on the Thames, and the London Eye.

Monday began with a visit to the Francis Crick Institute, a beautiful building that houses a variety of species. While the work focused primarily on mice, I also observed ferrets involved in influenza research—which was fascinating—and then I went on to see the opossums (super cute!). Much of the discussion revolved around training, which the Crick Institute was heavily involved in, and the contrasts between research performed in Canada as contrasted to the United Kingdom (UK). In the UK, animal research is strictly regulated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act, which is overseen by the Home Office. Research Institutions require an establishment license, researchers need project licenses, and individuals conducting procedures must each hold a personal license. Several formally named roles support compliance and welfare within each facility: the Named Person Responsible for Compliance (NPRC), Named Veterinary Surgeon (NVS), Named Animal Care and Welfare Officer (NACWO), Named Training and Competency Officer (NTCO), and Named Information Officer (NIO). In smaller facilities, a single individual may take on multiple roles.

Tuesday was spent at University of Oxford at the Department of Biomedical Services in the Medical Sciences Division, where I visited a non-human primate facility for the first time. It was an incredibly powerful experience. The department primarily worked with macaques, and the level of care and patience observed in their training programs was astonishing. The non-human primates were group-housed when possible and appeared to enjoy climbing structures, swings, and utilizing the hallway-facing windows. I had the joy of providing them with some enrichment and witnessing their unique personalities—an experience that will stay with me for a long time. I also got to watch them interact with touchscreens during Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans. It's mind-blowing to consider the trust and positive reinforcement to make that possible. Some of the non-human primates spent approximately two years in training before any data was able to be collected. We stayed another night in the city of Oxford and then it was back to London.

On Wednesday, I visited the zebrafish facility at King's College London. Their system included approximately 24 racks on a shared recirculating system, with a water treatment process that included softening, straining, bacterial filtration, and Ultraviolet (UV) sterilization. This was also where I was able to connect with a colleague I had previously only known through emails when discussing the Institute of Animal Technology (IAT) Congress. My hosts recommended the

nearby Borough Market after my visit, and it didn't disappoint, as it had an amazing variety of food, drinks, cheese, meats, and gifts.

On Thursday I visited the University of Cambridge's Medical Research Council (MRC) Laboratory of Molecular Biology (LMB), Ares Building. The team there was fantastic and offered excellent presentations. A particularly striking moment was observing their in-house ultrasound training, where pregnancy can be identified as early as day 5.5 in mice—fascinating to see up close. Another impressive initiative was their technician-led enrichment program for singly housed male mice. Their biosecurity protocols were also next level—every incoming animal, including those from commercial vendors, was rederived before entering the facility. They even had their own rederivation and cryopreservation teams.



On Friday, I spent the day at the University of Cambridge's Physiology, Neuroscience & Development department. The morning started at a bird behavioural facility where the birds were kept in large outdoor enclosures full of perches and enrichment—more like an aviary than laboratory. Then came the marmosets, a species of new world non-human primate: small, expressive, and full of personality. Spending time with them and feeding them mini marshmallows was pure joy. Just when I thought the day couldn't get better, I observed ponies that were used for vaccine research. As an equine person, I was thrilled to see the large, open fields they lived in, where they could roam and forage freely. On the farm, they had planted a tree in memoriam for the animals used in research—a beautiful and moving gesture. It was a full day of sharing treats and appreciating animals—an experience I'll never forget. That evening, we returned to London for another weekend of exploration, including visits to the British Museum and the

Natural History Museum. Sunday morning involved a quest for a laundromat (which was thankfully successful 😊) before we continued to Manchester.

Monday brought a tour of the Cancer Research UK Manchester Institute, an incredible facility, opened in 2023. *State-of-the-art* is an understatement when it came to the imaging equipment, surgical suites, and operations of this facility. They even had a dedicated genome editing and mouse model facility (GEMM) focused on generating novel genetically engineered mice.

By Tuesday morning, it was time to head to Liverpool for the IAT Congress. The Congress reminded me of the Canadian Association for Laboratory Animal Science (CALAS) Symposium in size and community feel—tight-knit, friendly, and full of familiar energy. I enjoyed browsing the vendor hall and seeing equipment I hadn't encountered in Canada or the US. This was also an opportunity to learn more about UAR (Understanding Animal Research), a dedicated animal research advocacy organization, which has no direct equivalent in Canada that I am aware of.



There was a social event on Tuesday and a Gala on Thursday which I was able to attend, complete with dinner, music, and dancing. It was a phenomenal way to wrap up two extraordinary weeks

I'm incredibly grateful to all the institutions that welcomed me and to everyone who took the time to show me around. The accommodations, travel arrangements and people made this such a fantastic experience. Thank you to AAALAC International and all of the sponsors for making this unforgettable journey possible.