

CHINA

Exotic pet vet relishes talk with animals

Extensive research enables specialist veterinarian to treat unusual species

By LIU MINGTAI in Changchun and ZHOU HUIYING

Over the past three years, veterinarian Zhang Xinxin has treated over 5,000 exotic pets, a vast increase from years prior when he would mainly treat cats and dogs. Such exotic pets include rabbits, turtles, snakes, parrots, lizards, hamsters and chinchillas. According to the 2025 China Pet Industry White Paper recently released by industry platform PetData, owners of fish accounted for 13.4 percent of all pet owners nationwide last year, an increase of 0.6 percentage points year-on-year, while owners of reptiles accounted for 11.3 percent, rising 2.9 percentage points. The number of people with pet rodents and birds accounted for 7.8 percent and 6.8 percent, respectively, increasing by 0.7 percentage points each. The growing exotic pet market has driven demand for vets with special skills, including 27-year-old Zhang, who works at Aiwei Pet Clinic in Changchun, Jilin province. Zhang became a vet at the clinic after graduating from Jilin Agricultural University in 2019. At the beginning, his patients were mostly cats and dogs, he said. “However, at the end of 2019 a mother brought her daughter to our clinic. The little girl was crying because her pet rabbit was sick. “Although the rabbit wasn’t expensive to buy, they were willing to spend hundreds of yuan on its treatment,” Zhang said. The rabbit’s breathing was weak, and after examination he diagnosed it with gastrointestinal disease. “Unfortunately, the pet’s condition was too severe for us to save its life,” he said. “I will never forget the sad expres-



Zhang Xinxin, a veterinarian in Changchun, Jilin province.

sion on the little girl’s face. It turns out that not only cats and dogs can be family companions.” After that, Zhang began to study the treatment of exotic pets. “Few vets could treat the diseases of exotic pets at that time in our city, so I hoped I could help more pet owners cure their exotic pets,” he said. However, Zhang found that curing exotic pets was completely different from treating dogs and cats. “During my four years in college, I gained little knowledge about exotic pets and there were very few related books,” he said. In order to better treat these animals, Zhang searched for books through various channels, looked for information and videos online, and often went to other cities for further study. “From 2020, every year I would spend about two months visiting pet clinics across the country, such as those in Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing in Jiangsu province,” he said. “I would learn theoretical knowledge from experienced vets while also gaining practical experience.” Two years later, Zhang had accumulated enough experience to start specializing in exotic pets. One day in July 2022, a pet owner brought his rabbit to the clinic. The rabbit couldn’t move due to abdominal pain at the time, Zhang said. He took an X-ray of the bunny and asked the owner feeding-related questions. After examination, he found that the issue was caused by



Zhang Xinxin treats a guinea pig at Aiwei Pet Clinic in Changchun. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

digestive obstruction due to improper feeding. Zhang prescribed oral medication, and two days later, the owner told Zhang that the rabbit had recovered. Nowadays, young people are generally busy with work, he said. Compared to cats and dogs, exotic pets often don’t require a lot of time for taking walks. They are quieter and less demanding. “For instance, young women like to keep fluffy and cute pets, which can bring high emotional value to them,” he said. As a result, among

the small mammals, rabbits are the most common. “Many people consider that vets specializing in exotic pets only deal with animals, but in fact, we also need more communication with their owners,” he said. “Many diseases of exotic pets are not obvious and it is crucial for the owners to describe their daily lives with them.” Additionally, whether the exotic pet owner can establish trust with the vet is also one of the key factors in curing pets’ diseases, he added. At the end of 2023, Zhang estab-

lished a dedicated exotic pet inpatient department at the clinic. “Many exotic pets have high environmental requirements during treatment, such as temperature, humidity and level of quietness,” Zhang said. “Therefore, we need to establish different wards for different exotic pets to ensure treatment effectiveness.” Han Junhong contributed to this story. Contact the writers at zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

Friendship hospital brings expertise to Africa

CONAKRY, Guinea — Morning light streams through the windows of the newly opened medical complex at the Sino-Guinean Friendship Hospital in Conakry. Radiologist Liu Peng and her Guinean colleague Amelie Lamah examine spinal scans on a 1.5-Tesla Magnetic Resonance Imaging machine, seamlessly switching between French and Chinese as they work.

This moment of teamwork captures the daily rhythm at one of Guinea’s largest public hospitals, and a flagship Chinese aid project. Since 1963, China has sent over 25,000 medical team members to 48 African countries, treating more than 230 million patients and winning the hearts of the African people with dedication.

They have been working to fight Ebola outbreaks, improve medical procedures and train generations of local professionals, shifting the focus from short-term aid to sustainable empowerment.

In March 2025, the 31st Chinese medical team arrived at the hospital, comprising 24 specialists from Beijing Friendship Hospital, the Beijing Municipal Health Commission and the Beijing Center for Disease Prevention and Control. More than half hold senior titles or doctorates. Beyond traditional expertise, they brought technologies such as orthopedic artificial intelligence planners and surgical robots.

“The AI system enables precise joint replacement modeling,” said team leader Wang Bin, adding that although Guinea’s intermittent power supply poses a challenge, the team is developing joint protocols with local staff to ensure stable application and long-term adaptability.

Hands-on knowledge transfer continues across departments: Guinean surgeons hone their joint replacement skills under Chinese guidance, and traditional medicine experts explore acupuncture treatments.

Cooperation of this kind has grown through decades of engagement. Since 1968, Chinese doctors have trained thousands of African medical professionals through hands-on clinical mentoring and exchange programs.

Lamah, director of the hospital’s radiology department, said their “diagnostic capabilities keep improving through this partnership.”

The hospital’s August 2023 expansion marked a major milestone, doubling clinical capacity through new Chinese-built facilities that now serve dual purposes: elevating patient care standards while creating advanced training opportunities for medical professionals. “Better infrastructure benefits both patients and medical advancement,” said Mohamed Diane, director general of the Sino-Guinean Friendship Hospital.

Wang reflected on the long-running partnership: “For 57 years, every Beijing medical team has shared one goal — making technology take root here.”

XINHUA

Innovative planter provides smart solution to indoor gardening

By PENG CHAO in Chengdu pengchao@chinadaily.com.cn

An innovative indoor planting system developed by a company based in Chengdu, Sichuan province, is reshaping indoor gardening, enabling apartment dwellers to cultivate their own fresh produce at home with minimal effort. The smart planting pod by Sichuan Zongtang Technology employs soilless cultivation technology and artificial intelligence to automatically manage plants’ water, light, nutrient supply and overall growth conditions. The system retails for around 3,200 yuan (\$443). Early adopter Liu Shahe, who shared her experience on social media platform Xiaohongshu, praised the smart device for fulfilling her dream of home gardening despite her frequent business trips. “It’s both stylish and functional, and incredibly easy to use,” she said, hailing the compact indoor garden as her favorite home appliance. Using the device, Liu has success-



The indoor planting system is displayed at a showroom of Sichuan Zongtang Technology in Chengdu, Sichuan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

fully grown a variety of crops including sunflowers, kale, purple-leaf lettuce and tomatoes. “I even made hotpot with vegetables I grew myself — it was super delicious,” she added. Luo Dan, cofounder and chief marketing officer of the company, said the 1.5-meter-tall pod consists of a vertical planting zone, light col-

umn and water tank, which work together to provide plants with simulated sunlight, irrigation and nutrients. Despite occupying just 0.25 square meters of floor space, the device can simultaneously grow up to 30 different kinds of plants — including vegetables, herbs, fruits and flowers — in its bamboo-shaped

planting zone, according to Luo. The light column is equipped with full-spectrum light-emitting diode lights that automatically simulate sunlight, she said. This ensures healthy growth of the plants even without natural light while consuming only 1.5 kilowatt-hours of electricity per day. “The smart planting pod makes the growing process extremely simple,” Luo said. “All you need to do is insert seedling cubes into the pod, set the lighting parameters, and let the system handle the rest.” She compared the new planting pod to traditional farming methods, saying its hydroponic vertical farming solution increases annual yield by over twentyfold while reducing pests and diseases and eliminating pesticide residues. To date, 200 of the pods have been sold, with sales extending to international markets including Vietnam and Malaysia, Luo said. The company said it is collaborating with lifestyle, food and gardening influencers for product testing in multiple scenarios. Meanwhile, it

is also collecting user feedback for further improvements. It plans to launch its second product line this year — a plant-based robotic pet designed for desktop use, featuring an affordable price point and light design. Industry experts pointed out that urban residents living in steel-and-concrete jungles crave closer ties to nature and high-quality fresh produce, while smart technologies like the internet of things and AI are transforming indoor gardening into a trendy urban lifestyle by eliminating traditional gardening barriers for beginners. A recent report by global market research company Technavio revealed that the global market for smart indoor gardens is experiencing significant growth as demand continues to rise for locally grown, fresh produce and sustainable farming practices. It forecasts that the market for smart indoor garden systems will increase by \$1.33 billion at a compound annual growth rate of 9.4 percent between 2024 and 2029.

Monitoring stations improve capability to study volcanic activity

CHANGCHUN — Ascending the Changbai Mountains in Northeast China, the fresh green of early spring slowly gives way to lingering snow. On a slope stands a three-story building — the largest volcanic monitoring station in the country. Located in Jilin province, the Changbai Mountains are well-known for the mysterious Tianchi crater lake, yet few know that they were the site of one of the most powerful volcanic eruptions in recorded history. In 946, an eruption dispersed ash more than 10,000 kilometers away, reaching as far as Greenland.

To strengthen China’s capacity to study and predict volcanic activity, the station was established in the mid-1990s by the China Earthquake Administration and the Jilin provincial government. Over the past two decades, it has evolved into China’s most comprehensively equipped volcanic monitoring facility. The station operates 15 monitoring points across the northern, western and southern slopes of the mountains, and its research team has expanded from three people to 10. Kong Qingjun, head of the station, remembers the challenges in

the early days, when there was no optical fiber communication. “Most of the data had to be stored on hard disks and retrieved manually every 10 days,” he said. “Once, my colleague and I got lost in heavy fog while trying to replace the hard disks.” Thanks to infrastructure improvements in recent years, many field stations now have optical fiber and Wi-Fi connections, which greatly enhance real-time data transmission, Kong said. But challenges remain. “Continuous data collection is crucial,” he said. “Yet the harsh con-

ditions — strong winds, heavy snow and lightning — demand constant vigilance from our technicians.” Globally, volcano research has a much longer history. The world’s first observatory was founded in 1841 at Italy’s Mount Vesuvius, followed by the first modern observatory at Hawaii’s Kilauea Volcano in the United States around 70 years later. By comparison, China lags behind some developed countries in volcanic monitoring, facing challenges such as limited historical data, a shortage of advanced equipment and insufficient monitoring tech-

nologies. “Volcanic eruptions are rare and occur over long cycles, so we place great importance on collaborating with scientific institutions both domestically and internationally,” said Liu Guoming, the station’s chief engineer, noting that researchers from the station have visited volcano observatories in countries such as Italy and the United States, sometimes even witnessing eruptions firsthand. With its growing academic reputation, the station has built long-term partnerships with volcano experts and institutions in countries such as the United States, Japan, Italy and

Russia. Moreover, China’s continued investment in the field has brought in new technologies, such as satellite remote sensing and drone-mounted instruments. According to Kong, the station is working with the Jilin Earthquake Agency to upgrade its early warning system. “We’re building an artificial intelligence-powered platform to improve our ability to detect and issue warnings for potential volcanic activity,” he said. “After over 20 years of continuous monitoring, we are gradually uncovering the secrets of the Changbai Mountains,” he said. “Our goal is to grow into a world-class volcanic monitoring station.”

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