I was lucky enough to spend almost four weeks this summer at Lilongwe Wildlife Centre in Malawi.

LWC is the only wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centre of its kind in Malawi and is based in the country’s capital, Lilongwe. It comprises a wildlife rescue unit, which is ambulatory and provides veterinary treatment to wild animals, and the centre itself, where rescued animals are brought for rehabilitation before release. The centre is run by the Lilongwe Wildlife Trust, which also does a lot of outreach work with the local community, including conservation education and adult literacy work.

While in Malawi, I spent a few mornings a week in LWC’s veterinary clinic working closely with their vet. The work mostly involved primates (the centre had yellow baboons, olive baboons, blue monkeys, and vervet monkeys) and included simple vaccinations, general health checks, and quarantine exams. Some more invasive procedures were also required, including the insertion of contraceptive implants and a full exploratory laparotomy on a baboon with suspected liver disease (unfortunately we found a large tumour and the baboon had to be euthanised).

When I was not in the clinic, I was involved in the more general animal husbandry work that went on every day in the centre to ensure the animals were well looked after. This included preparing food, cleaning equipment and enclosures, and “animal observations” (either for health monitoring or to assess how integrations were going). In particular, the two elderly lions at the centre, Simba and Bella, required almost constant observation, as their health was unfortunately deteriorating and the centre wanted to keep a close eye on their behaviour, including eating, drinking, and how frequently they walked about their enclosure etc.

Finally, I also spent some time at the centre working on the local community outreach programmes. This mainly involved helping make interactive signs to engage children visiting the centre and help educate them in conservation and wildlife issues. I also spent one afternoon helping to teach a group of local women how to read and write English.

I banked up my days off while working at the centre and used them to go on safari in South Luangwa National Park, Zambia, towards the end of my stay. This was an amazing experience, and on my two morning and two night drives I saw some incredible animals in their natural habitat, including elephants, lions, leopards, hippos, giraffes, buffalo, warthogs, antelope, and many others.

Overall, my time spent in Malawi (and Zambia) was an incredible experience and has given me a great insight into what my career might hold in the future if I decide to go into wildlife medicine.