

“I deeply love my profession”

Lisa Arlandi is an animal caretaker at the Faculty of Biology and Medicine (FBM) at UNIL. Winner of the FBM 3R Animal Caretaker Award 2024, she is committed to promoting the gentle handling of animals.

Often working behind the scenes, animal caretakers are the true backbone of animal research facilities. Their daily tasks go far beyond cleaning cages and providing food. Lisa Arlandi's dedication exemplifies this: as a caretaker in the FBM animal facility (Épalinges site), she was awarded the FBM 3R Animal Caretaker Award 2024 for her project **“Promoting Handling of Mice and Rats in Our Animal Facilities”**. Interview.

What is the goal of your project?

The main aim is to promote best practice of gentle handling techniques, directly within the animal housing facilities of our faculty. By offering regular on-site training in addition to the courses provided by external centers, the idea is to address the specific theoretical and practical training needs of all persons working with animals, whether they are scientists or caretakers.

What motivated you to submit this project for the 3R award?

I had this idea while discussing with researchers. I'm very interested in the projects carried out by our scientists and collaborate closely with them in animal experiments. During our conversations, I noticed that researchers often mentioned the need to refine certain techniques or update their knowledge on new handling methods. However, training sessions offered by the [Lemanic Animal Facility Network](#) (ResAL), for example, are often difficult for them to join due to logistical constraints related to scheduling or course locations.

Since becoming a ResAL instructor in 2023, I thought: why not also organize training directly on-site in our own animal facilities? This initiative was well received by the faculty's 3R coordinator as well as the animal experimentation and facility management teams.

What are the advantages of gentle handling beyond improving animal welfare?

The key concept here is respect for the animals, which is really at the core of my work. From personal experience, interacting with animals in a more natural and less stressful way does not just lead to positive changes in the behavior of mice and rats. It also impacts the person handling them: there is less stress and anxiety, which improves technique proficiency, such as when administering injections, and thereby enhances both safety and efficiency.

These benefits directly translate to experimental results: reducing stress for both animals and scientists helps minimize biases and produces more reliable data. Gentle handling thus contributes not only to the **refining** factor of the 3Rs, but also to **reducing** the number of animals needed for experiments.

That said, to put these techniques in place when working with animals requires a certain level of commitment. The animals need to be gradually accustomed to the presence of human hands in their cage. This process takes some time; about a month depending on the environment and species — and includes getting bitten a few times along the way! (*laughs*) But the return on investment is absolutely worth it.

***Final question: the daily tasks of animal caretakers are not well known to many people.
What does a typical day look like for you?***

There is really no such thing as a “typical” day! Generally, our shift starts at 6:45 a.m. When we arrive, we inspect the facilities: the animal housing areas, cleaning rooms, and equipment. Then we handle emails and requests from researchers via PyRAT, a management software that allows us to track each animal and communicate directly with people responsible for the experiments. After a break, we move on to checking the animals: cage conditions, food, water, monitor connections, and general health status. If necessary, we contact the scientists to discuss potential interventions.

Afternoons are more variable: cleaning the facilities, changing cages, providing specific care, or performing interventions for experiments. Finally, at the end of the day, we always conduct a last inspection of the facilities before leaving. It is really this variety of tasks that excites me. I deeply love my profession, and I see our work as an integral part of a shared mission with scientists.

To learn more :

- Training provided by the Lemanic Animal Facility Network (ResAL):
[Qualifying education](#) (Modules 1 & 2)
[Continuing education](#)
- More information about animal experimentation at UNIL: [FBM website](#)

Wondering what the FBM’s Animal Welfare Officers (AWO) are doing? To be discovered in an upcoming article (early 2025).