NZVA
New Zealand Veterinary Association
Te Pae Kīrehe

WILDLIFE VETERINARIANS of the NZVA

WILDLIFE BRANCH OF THE NZVA

Wildlife Connect

April 2025

President's Message

Belated Happy New Year to all our readers!

The 2024 November conference held in Palmerston North was deemed a success and was well attended by branch members from throughout the country. (A more detailed review of the conference can be found below). We have several interesting articles in this edition, including an update on avian influenza as well as sedation of cats in the field.

All members of the committee have kindly agreed to stay on for another year! Myself, Mint Bhetraratana (treasurer), James Chatterton (Secretary), Kate McInnes, Kerri Morgan, Kelly Buckle, Harry Taylor, Samantha Howarth, and Kate Pickard will meet in April to discuss the upcoming events and plans for 2025.

Enjoy what remains of autumn and feel free to contact the committee at any time this year with questions or concerns, which we will endeavour to raise with the NZVA. I look forward to meeting some of you.

Ngā mihi,
Sam Lee

Wildlife Branch of the NZVA Annual Conference, Palmerston North, 22–24 Nov., 2024

Forty branch members gathered in Palmerston North last November for the annual Wildlife Branch conference. Held over three days, various talks, workshops, and fieldtrips were well attended and received.

The first day of presentations were focused on postgraduate research being undertaken at Massey. Talks included current research in the alternative treatments of coccidiosis in kiwi, hoiho/yellow-eyed penguin gyrovirus, and sub-Antarctic mortality surveillance of pakake/whakahao/New Zealand sea lions. An entertaining presentation by Isabel Castro on kiwi reproduction, and one on oiled wildlife response by Bridey White, rounded out an enjoyable morning.

The afternoon saw Emily Short from ARC Vets host a very informative workshop on avian radiology, while James Chatterton from Auckland Zoo hosted a workshop on avian anaesthesia. Both workshops were well attended and the feedback was positive.

Kerri Morgan then hosted a wine and cheese event at Wildbase Recovery on the Esplanade, which was an excellent location for attendees to meet and greet.

Day two comprised various branch member talks with a focus on highly pathogenic avian influenza, which was discussed by Kate McInnes from DOC as well as several MPI staff. James Chatterton provided a 10-year summary on turtle strandings processed by Auckland Zoo, and Diana Galbraith presented on kekeno/New Zealand fur seal conservation.

A field trip to Pūkaha/Mount Bruce was attended by 22 delegates whom enjoyed hearing of the conservation success and ongoing education provided by the staff within the reserve. Attendees had the afternoon to explore numerous trails and interact with the wildlife. Positive reviews despite some inclement weather.

The branch dinner was held at Nero Restaurant on Saturday night where a good meal, beer, and wine were shared among attendees.

The final morning of the conference covered a variety of topics from lead toxicosis in kea, and common pathological findings in kororā/little blue penguins to dermatitis in captive dart frogs!

Once everyone had departed Palmerston North and the conference could be reviewed by the committee, it was deemed to be an overall success in terms of attendance, enjoyment and almost sticking to a budget! It was a great chance for members to visit Massey once

again and hear of the conservation efforts still occurring locally. A special thanks to all people involved in the conference organisation, especially the Massey Sport and Event Centre for hosting us, Kerri Morgan for her convening skills, NZVA, and Wharerata for the catering.

We hope to see you at the next conference! (Location to be determined!)

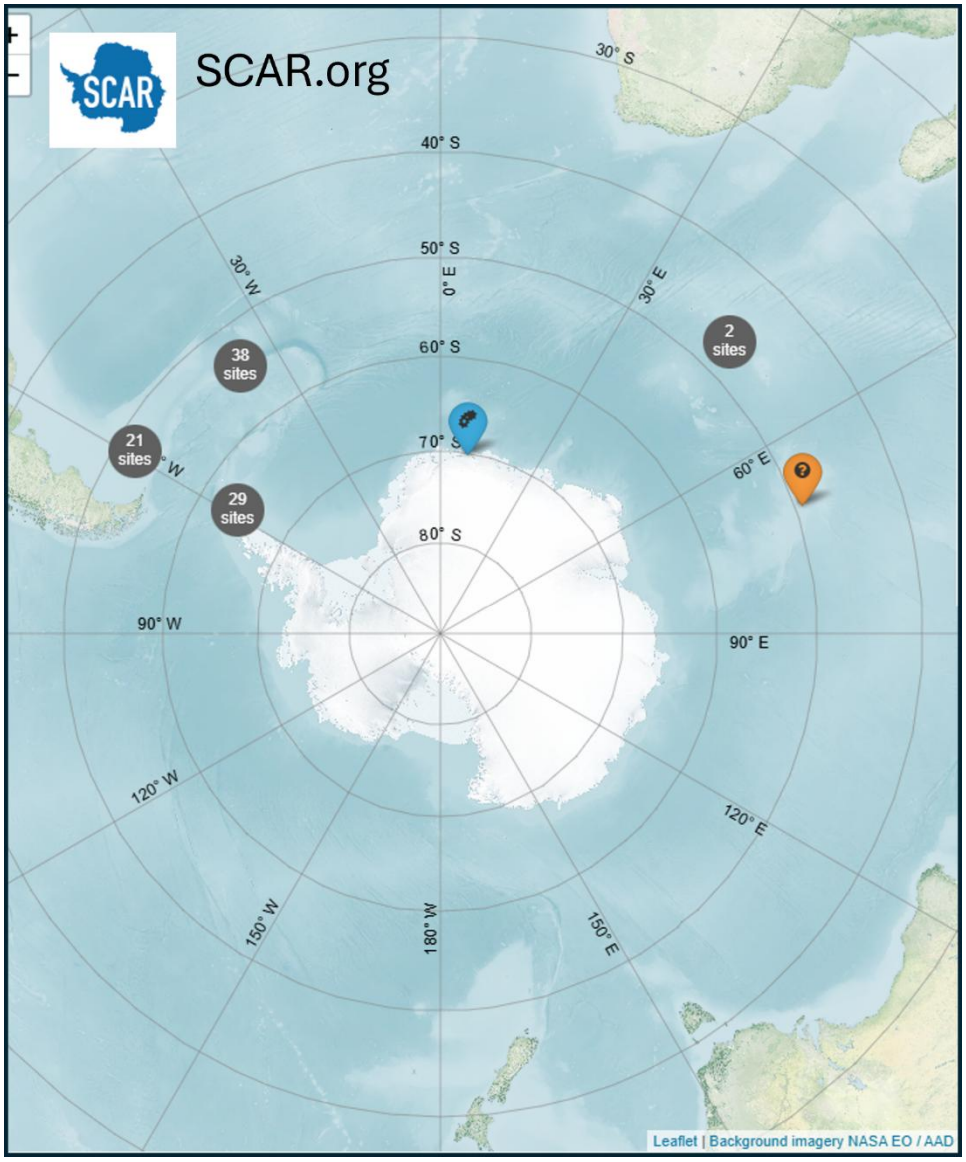
Sam Lee

Attendees gather at Wildbase Recovery on the Esplanade. (Photo: Kate McInnes.)

DOC

HPAI H5N1 Update as of Feb. 2025

Cases of HPAI H5N1 are continuing around the world, with Oceania still the only geographic area that has not reported any cases. There has been spread into the sub-Antarctic islands in the Indian Ocean—confirmed by PCR in Crozet—and is suspected (but not yet tested) on Marion and Kergulean (see the map below, which is available and regularly updated on the Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research website.



Cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 in the Antarctic as of February 2025. (Source: Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research website, SCAR.org.)

As part of the One Health approach, MPI, DOC, and Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora have been preparing advice and information, which is available on their websites (see below), and working with partners and stakeholders to develop preparedness planning. These websites are being frequently updated, so it's is worth checking in to see what's new.

MPI: HPAI or high pathogenicity avian influenza | NZ Government

DOC: Avian influenza: Wildlife health

Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora: Avian influenza

Where are we at now?

The spring/summer arrivals of birds and marine mammals is complete now, so we have passed another risk period with no reports of cases. The OneHealth agencies are continuing to monitor international reports on species affected and geographic spread. Surveillance measures to enable early detection of cases are continuing, including notifications to the MPI 0800 hotline, sampling by researchers and DOC, and sampling by veterinarians at wildlife hospitals. DOC's vaccine trial on five threatened species is continuing, with the 12-month blood testing due over the next couple of months. That will provide data on antibody persistence, and inform potential vaccination programmes.

HPAI H7 outbreak:

An outbreak of H7 was detected on a free-range layer chicken farm in Otago in December. The H7N6 strain is closely related to low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) strains present in wild birds in New Zealand. Testing also shows that the strain is unrelated to the H7 strain of avian influenza identified in Australia earlier this year. For more information about the response, see A strain of bird flu (H7N6) in Otago | NZ Government. *(Editor's note: see also the MPI Wildlife Surveillance Update below.)*

What can I do?

Report: if you see three or more sick or dead birds in a group within a short period, or suspect a case of HPAI, contact the Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline on 0800 80 99 66 immediately. Provide details of the mortality (such as species involved, number dead, and location) and your contact details. Use PPE before handling any potentially infected birds.

Prepare: be aware of the clinical signs and risks. Think about how you will manage avian patients in the clinic to manage bird flu risks. Advice for veterinarians is available on the MPI website (Information for vets about HPAI (bird flu) | NZ Government), and your wildlife committee is developing more specific wildlife-focused advice in collaboration with NZVA and MPI.

Kate McInnes, wildlife veterinarian, DOC.

MPI Wildlife Surveillance Update

MPI has wildlife surveillance services contracts with five veterinary wildlife hospitals and one rehabilitation centre (The Wildlife Hospital, Dunedin; South Island Wildlife Hospital; New Zealand Centre for Conservation Medicine at

Auckland Zoo; Wellington Zoo; Wildbase Hospital at Massey University; and BirdCare Aotearoa). MPI relies on these contracts to provide sufficient sensitivity of coverage for wildlife health surveillance across New Zealand, in order to meet the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) standards for wildlife health surveillance. The contracts are also a valuable tool to monitor for WOAH-notifiable listed diseases in wildlife, and to monitor wildlife health in general, which is interdependent with the health of humans and domestic animals (e.g., wildlife may act as indicators of disease risk to domestic animals and humans).

In more general terms, the wildlife surveillance programme plays an important role in the wider animal health surveillance system to enable:

- Early detection of exotic/emerging pests and/or diseases to provide the option of timely eradication,
- Meeting the international reporting requirements that are needed to maintain the certification of New Zealand as free of particular pests and diseases,
- Demonstrating integrity of surveillance across terrestrial animal health (including wildlife) in New Zealand.
- Additionally, the data generated through this surveillance programme informs improvements to targeted surveillance and general surveillance programmes.

The December 2024 outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in poultry in Otago, New Zealand was caused by a H7N6 subtype of the virus. This most likely originated from low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) in wild birds, which converted to HPAI in poultry on the infected property. Following this outbreak, a requirement for increased surveillance in wild birds was identified: there is a need to determine what the prevalent strains of avian influenza circulating in wild birds are. This need has prompted MPI to activate avian influenza sampling clauses in its six wildlife disease surveillance contracts. MPI is asking the hospitals to collect samples from 80 inpatient birds from January to July 2025. Birds will be screened for LPAI, and if there are any cases suspicious for HPAI, these will be notified to MPI through the Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline. The results of this work will inform the wildlife community, veterinarians, and government on the prevalence of LPAI in New Zealand's wild birds.

Baukje Lenting, Senior Adviser Surveillance, Ministry for Primary Industries

Sedating Cats for Predator Research

GPS/radio collars are an important tool in our work to manage the impacts of feral cats on native species. Sometimes collars are used to monitor how feral cats navigate the landscape and determine their territory range and densities, other times they are used to measure the effectiveness of detection and control methods.

In January, DOC vets Kate McInnes and Rachel Stanyer travelled to Otago to assist with feral cat sedation as part of a DOC National Eradication Team project to attach GPS collars for monitoring efficacy of new tools being developed for control of feral cats.

DOC staff prepare to sedate a cat. (Photo: K. McInnes.)

A team of six to eight people worked to set up trapping lines, checking traps each morning and adding more as the days progressed. The vets and two staff bounced (literally) between the trap lines in a DOC ute via various roads and 4WD tracks, carrying the handling gear and sedatives, ready to leap into action if a feral cat was caught.

A collar being attached to a sedated cat. (Photo: K. McInnes.)

As part of the visit, two DOC staff members were also trained in administration of the sedatives. This is authorised under a Ministry for Primary Industries approved Operating Plan. It requires an Animal Ethics Committee approval for the research, and the Departmental veterinarian oversees the training and audits the use of the drugs. This enables staff to undertake feral cat research work in remote locations where it is not feasible to have a veterinarian present 24/7 for long periods of time (or where she isn't fit enough to keep up anymore!). It also means multiple projects can run concurrently across the motu if needed.

The feral cats are sedated with a ketamine/medetomidine mix, which allows for good deep sedation of sufficient duration for the handling and collaring. Reversal with atipamezole means a faster recovery for the cats to return to normal for release after the procedures.

The cats also receive subcutaneous fluids and eye drops for protection during the sedation, and are placed on a foam mat for insulation. Extremes of temperature can occur at any time in the great New Zealand outdoors, so body temperature is maintained using hand-sized heat pads in the cold, and cooling with shade and water in the heat. The cats are placed in a protected, safe location prior to reversal and are observed until they are sufficiently mobile to be safe.

In addition to having the collars attached, the cats were photographed and, if their markings were indistinct, hair dye was used to create unique markings that will be easily identified via the camera traps also deployed in the area.

The trip was very successful, with two new staff signed off for future work and 13 feral cats caught and collared. Although tempted, neither vet came back with a new hair colour nor a fancy collar.

Kate McInnes, wildlife veterinarian, DOC.

(Editor's note: for an example of the impact feral cats can have on native species, see "Feral Cat Destroys Endangered Tern Colony in One Weekend" in the Snippets section below.)

DOC vet checks sedated cat. (Photo: K. McInnes.)

NOTICES

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Wildlife Branch 2024 Funds

Every year the Wildlife Branch of the NZVA provides funding through two specific funds. Applications for these funds are open during September and October, and the successful recipients are announced at the annual conference. This year, the committee is pleased to announce the following funding was awarded at the 2024 conference.

Marion Cunningham Memorial Scholarship

The MCMF funds projects that are compatible with our SIB goals to enhance veterinary contributions to the welfare and management of New Zealand's wildlife, to promote

communication among both veterinarians and non-veterinarians with expertise in wildlife management and research, and to encourage conservation, especially by veterinary contributions to the management of threatened species.

The 2024 recipients were:

- Anne-Sophie Page ($2,000) for her project on the pathology of avian malaria caused by *Plasmodium* species in tawaki/Fiordland crested penguins (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*).
- Samantha Howarth ($2,000) for her project investigating the impact of parasites on New Zealand's penguin species.

Wildlife Branch Grant

The Wildlife Branch Grant was established in 2013 to provide support to veterinarians who have a strong interest in further developing their veterinary skills for working with native New Zealand wildlife species. Our purpose for such a fund is to increase the skills and knowledge of veterinarians in wildlife medicine and to promote the benefits of treating wildlife in practice.

The 2024 recipients were:

- Lisa Argilla (Wildlife Hospital, Dunedin) ($1,000) for a practice-based wildlife disease investigation, which included performing basic diagnostic sampling on hoiho/yellow-eyed penguin chicks.
- Jessica Van Damme ($1,000) for continuing professional development in wildlife medicine, including conference attendance, workshop participation, and placement at a wildlife hospital.

Funding Request

In late 2024 the Wildlife Branch received a request for urgent funding to cover necropsies of hoiho/yellow-eyed penguin chicks. This season saw a sudden and unexpected increase in mortality of hoiho chicks, and it was vital to understand the cause of this increase in this endangered and endemic species. The Wildlife Branch allocates funding each year for projects and SIB goals, and we were pleased to be able to provide $4,000 to pay for final year vet student Kate Pickard to complete necropsies on all deceased hoiho chicks. The information gathered will prove invaluable in addressing the decline of this species.

Snippets

Penguin Poo Power

Did you ever wonder at the pressures required for a penguin to projectile poo away from its nest? Well you need search no more. This wonderful article has determined the parameters required to calculate this, including the distance travelled, the density and viscosity of the material and the shape, aperture, and elevation of the penguin vent.
Note that these have been calculated for fully grown chinstrap (*Pygoscelis antarcticus*) and Adélie (*Pygoscelis adeliae*) penguins and did not take into account wind speed and how that affects where penguins aim.

Obviously more work is needed to understand the pressures for other Sphenisciformes, and different age groups. Perhaps if anyone is interested in completing a PhD (Poo height Distance), they could start with this article!

Feral Cat Destroys Endangered Tern Colony in One Weekend

In a sobering example of the impact of feral cats on Aotearoa New Zealand's native wildlife, a lone feral cat wiped out the largest tarapirohe/black-fronted tern colony on Canterbury's Waiau Toa/Clarence River over a weekend.

In December, DOC reported that a solo male feral cat had reached a large river island with 95 tarapirohe nests. The cat ate several adult birds, as well as chicks and eggs, and disturbed the colony enough to cause the abandonment of most nests. Intensive conservation work had been done in the area over the past decade to protect this species.

“The devastating incident has destroyed the largest colony on the river despite extensive predator control in the area. It highlights how difficult it is to trap feral cats, which are intelligent and wary,” said DOC South Marlborough Senior Biodiversity Ranger Pat Crowe. Crowe said the timing was “particularly bad,” because most of the nests had chicks, or eggs at the point of hatching, which meant the adults wouldn’t be able to nest again that season.

According to Canterbury Regional Council (Environment Canterbury) Principal Biodiversity Advisor Frances Schmechel, continuation of this work was key, because about two-thirds of the tern’s nesting habitat was located in Canterbury’s braided rivers.

You can read the full article here. (See also “Sedating Cats for Predator Research” earlier in this issue.)

NOTICES

Conference Notices

2025 Wildlife Branch of the NZVA Conference

(Dates and Location TBA)
https://www.nzva.org.nz/branches/wildlife/

2025 Oamaru Penguin Symposium

1–2 May 2025
Oamaru, New Zealand
https://www.oamarupenguinsymposium.com/

2025 NZ Bird Conference

31 May – 2 June 2025
Auckland, New Zealand
https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/nz-bird-conference-2025/

11th International Symposium on Avian Influenza

24–26 June 2025
St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada
https://www.avianinfluenzasymposium.com/ISAI2025

Wildlife Disease Association Australasian Section Conference 2025

28 September – 3 October 2025
Adelaide Hills, SA, Australia
https://www.wda-a.org/

ZAA Conference 2025

29 July – 1 August 2025
Darwin, NT, Australia
https://zooaquarium.org.au/ZAAConference

Wildlife Disease Association Conference 2025

27 July – 1 August 2025
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada
https://wda2025.com/

Australasian Ornithological Conference 2025

18–20 November 2025
Boorloo/Perth, WA, Australia
https://aoc.org.au/

CONTACTS

Contacts

WILDLIFE BRANCH OF THE NZVA
Website: https://www.nzva.org.nz/branches/wildlife/
Email: wildlife@vets.org.nz

BIRDS NZ
For information about ornithological research in NZ, including the NZ Bird Atlas Scheme
https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
0800 DOC HOT (0800 362 468)
To report conservation law infringements, injured or sick wildlife (1–2 animals, for 3 or more call the MPI Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline, below), and whale or dolphin strandings

FOREST & BIRD
For information about wildlife conservation and advocacy in NZ
https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/

MPI EXOTIC PEST AND DISEASE HOTLINE
0800 809 966
To report a suspected exotic pest or disease of plants or animals

NEW ZEALAND CENTRE FOR CONSERVATION MEDICINE (NZCCM)
Auckland Zoo, Auckland
Phone: 09 360 3805

SPCA
For information about wildlife-related welfare issues (e.g., feeding birds, the dangers of fishing tackle, etc.)
https://www.spca.nz/advice-and-welfare/category?cat=animals-in-the-wild

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Email: The.Nest@wellingtonzoo.com
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Phone: 06 350 5329

WILDLIFE PATHOLOGY
Wildlife Pathology Submission Form
Link: huia_submission_form.pdf
Email: wildbase@massey.ac.nz
Phone: 06 350 4525